



Gouvernement du Québec
Conseil supérieur
de l'éducation

Comité catholique

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE PROPOSED POLICY STATEMENT ON SCHOOL REFORM

Recommendations to the ministre de l'Éducation
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Introduction

Over the past months, the Comité catholique pursued its reflection on the project of school reorganization put forward by the Quebec government.¹ It carried out this reflection in light of the principles set forth in its document of last July on *The Catholic Public School in an Evolving School System*². Closely following the outline in the document submitted for discussion, it now seeks to express its reactions in a more precise manner and to formulate some recommendations. The Comité catholique focuses its attention on the confessional aspects and limits its intervention to these aspects. But, given the existing links between the various elements of the governmental projects, the Comité will conclude with questions about other aspects of school reorganization.

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1. Gouvernement du Québec, ministère de l'Éducation, *The Quebec School: A Responsible Force in the Community*, June 1982. Referred to later by the abbreviation: White Paper.
 2. Comité catholique, *The Catholic Public School in an Evolving School System*, July, 1982.

I- Confessional Aspects of School Reorganization

1. Analysis of the Situation

The first two chapters of the White Paper try to present an overview of the basic facts of the situation. The first contains a brief historical summary which outlines rather accurately the activity of the Comité catholique and the establishment of its Regulation (White Paper, pp. 10 and 11). The second identifies a certain number of problems to be solved and expectations to be fulfilled. As far as this matter is concerned, the White Paper draws attention particularly to the «disturbing effect created by the principle and practice of exemption from religious instruction» (p. 23) and the «effects of current arrangements for confessionalism in the schools» (p. 24).

The Comité cannot remain silent regarding some statements made on these two points. It is obvious that there are problems. But they are given an importance and an extension that they do not have throughout the system. Furthermore, they are analysed in a theoretical fashion which is less than convincing.

This becomes obvious when dealing with the exemption from religious instruction. To give a complete picture, one should have also mentioned the example of many schools where the exemption clause was very tactfully applied and satisfied the minority groups. The members of the Comité have in mind districts where the instructional arrangements offered to the exempted pupils are of very high quality. The determining factor in this case is the open-mindedness of the school environment as well as the administrative and financial operations. If it is relatively difficult to influence minds directly, it is easier for governments to provide financial support. Recogn-

dition should be given here to the usefulness and the effectiveness of the special programmes that were put in place these last years to give financial support to the setting up of an adequate structure for the exempted pupils.

With regard to the principle of exemption itself, the Comité still thinks that it is not discriminatory. It took the opportunity to restate this last May in its document on the option between Catholic religious instruction and moral instruction.³

Concerning the present provisions for school confessionality, the White Paper identifies two areas of concern.

The first refers to the fact that it is the regulations of the confessional committees that guarantee «freedom of conscience and the right to free religious expression» (White Paper, p. 24). In fact, it is abnormal that these rights be guaranteed only within confessional schools and, consequently, according to terms established by confessional committees. This could be understood at a time when all schools were confessional. It would have been fitting to profit from the experience gained and to extend these guarantees to all public schools, and this in ways most likely to satisfy the greater number. This evolution appears to be normal, without necessarily disparaging the past.

The second area of concern deals with the manner in which confessionality is integrated into the educational project of the school. The document finds surprising, in particular, that organizations «outside» of the school, like the school board and the Comité catholique, are

3. Comité catholique, *Catholic Religious Instruction and Moral Instruction in Catholic Schools*, May 1982.

called upon to decide on the confessional status of a school and to uphold «legally» the «religious character of the educational project» (White Paper, p. 25). The members of the Comité do not understand this astonishment which appears to them to have little justification. Actually, it is not unusual that an external organization be mandated by law to grant legal recognition to a particular school which fulfills certain conditions. It should be enough to recall here that the ministère de l'Éducation, to ensure the protection of the public, reserves to itself the granting or refusal of teaching permits to private schools wishing to offer their services. A school project is not automatically a valid public service by virtue of having been formulated by a group of people: it must be verified or accredited in one way or another. It is not surprising, according to present practice, that the school board should transmit a request for recognition. Must it be recalled that within the framework of the present law, the school board is responsible for the schools in its territory: it falls to this body, made up of democratically elected members, to ascertain the wishes of the parents and of the educators in order to sanction them. This is not always easy, since conflicts can arise within the same school between those holding divergent positions. In the great majority of cases, school boards have played a positive role and have been able to find reasonable solutions. Besides, the experience acquired during the past years has allowed the setting up of more precise mechanisms through which it is possible to identify more clearly the will of the school milieu and to take this into account. It must be remembered first of all that each school must now elaborate an explicit educational project, which was not the case at the time of the actual repartitioning of

powers.⁴ Moreover, before requesting that the Catholic character of a school be recognized, the school board is under obligation to take the advice of the school committee which usually consults most of the parents.

Without dwelling longer on this analysis of the situation, the Comité will address the governmental proposal by first outlining the main dimensions of confessionality. Then it will examine the more concrete provisions envisaged for the school and the various structures which support its activity.

2. The Main Dimensions of Confessionality

The school which the governmental project wants to set up is a «public and community» school, open to all and respectful of everyone. From this perspective it wishes to express in a new way everything pertaining to the religious dimension and to confessionality.

On the one hand, the White Paper shows its intention to inscribe in the future law a certain number of individual rights concerning freedom of conscience and of religion. Hopefully, this will spare the school's being taken over by intransigent factions: everyone would be fully accepted and could breathe freely (See White Paper, p. 39).

4. At the time the law was passed, the concept of an educational project was little used, even if the reality was present in an implicit manner. May we be allowed to point out that the work on the Comité catholique contributed much toward the formulation of this notion which became one of the pivotal factors of the reform currently underway. Without being exhaustive, one could refer to *Religion in Today's School* (Voies et impasses, Volume 1), 1974, pp. 27-35, as well as to *C'est-à-dire. Regards sur les mots qui servent à dire l'éducation chrétienne*, 1981, the item «Projet éducatif».

On the other hand, the White Paper wants to ensure the greatest possible respect of collective rights by allowing for the elaboration of an educational project of Christian dimension and for the school to be officially recognized as Catholic or Protestant. «If it is to avoid becoming just another standardized school reduced to the lowest common denominator it must also ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity to voice their opinions and to express what they see as the main themes of a coherent educational project» (pp. 39-40).

It is around these two closely linked poles that the expression of confessionality is rearranged. All considerations that may be made later on are valid only in as much as these two dimensions of the project are safeguarded.

2.1 Regarding Individual Rights: guarantees ensuring respect for the rights and freedoms of conscience and religion

So as to «give better protection to the rights and freedoms of conscience and religion in each and every school» (p. 59), the Education Act itself will ensure a certain number of guarantees that every public school, primary and secondary, will have to respect (See 4.2.4.a, p. 76).

Until now, respect of individual rights was guaranteed by the regulations of the confessional committees. This gave them a very firm legal base since the law itself granted to confessional committees the power to make regulations. However, these regulations could not apply except to those schools recognized as Catholic or Protestant and solely on the terms established by one or the other committee.

With the appearance of public schools which were neither Catholic nor Protestant, it became necessary to specify in the law which kinds of services of a religious and moral nature would be offered. The option taken by the White Paper is, therefore, a good one. The fact that freedom of conscience and the services which ensure its respect be guaranteed in each public school will certainly facilitate the discussion over the choice and elaboration of the school's educational project. This responds, moreover, to a wish expressed many times by the Catholic population, namely that the public school provide high calibre Catholic religious instruction and pastoral animation, while welcoming those who hold other convictions.⁵

2.2 Regarding Collective Rights: Possibility for Catholic Schools

While the guarantees mentioned so far protect individual rights, other stipulations of the White Paper ensure the respect of a democratically expressed desire, regarding the status of schools. In fact, the government allows any community, which so desires, the possibility of drawing up a school project with reference to private convictions or, again, to a particular religious denomination. It allows, moreover, that a school which has a Catholic educational project «can be officially recognized as a Catholic school by means of confessional status»⁶ granted through an authorized instance.

5. See Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *La confessionnalité*, August 1981, Annex VIII, pp. 67-81. Also, Comité catholique, *Éléments de lecture de la situation confessionnelle à partir de sondages*, photocopied text, December 1981.

6. This statement detailing the information in the White Paper is taken from a speech by the ministre de l'Éducation to a Congress of the Association québécoise des Conseillers au service de l'éducation chrétienne, 31st October 1982. See p. 8.

These stipulations appear to be quite fundamental. They respect the views of large strata of the population. They spare the proposed reform those ruptures which usually are destructive. And they also present great advantages.

In asking each community to work together and to elucidate its expectations in a school project, the governmental project has the merit of setting up an operation of periodic evaluation. The Comité fully supports the idea that a school's confessional status should not be a mere label without real substance. It must correspond to a will, to an explicitly expressed intention which gives rise to real involvement on the part of various agents. In so doing, no assumption is made with regard to the wishes of the groups; they are allowed to express themselves within a previously set framework. In an evolving world, it is useful to have a mechanism which thus allows a real link to be maintained between the services provided by the school, the education philosophy that it promotes on the one hand, and the expectations of the milieu on the other.

Moreover, in asking that an authorized instance be called upon to recognize the «nature of the religious orientations» that the school chose for itself (p. 78), the White Paper introduces a clarifying factor which cannot but be beneficial to all.

The status of a Catholic school which will eventually be granted, will officially recognize that a Catholic school project exists, that it is supported by the community as a whole and the substantial commitments were undertaken to achieve it. This recognition ratifies, so to speak, the will the participants and authenticates the validity of their undertaking. On the one hand, this will

show school authorities, as well as the staff as a whole, the orientation which the school chose and which should be carefully respected. In this way many ambiguities will be cleared up and many conflicts could be resolved in an orderly and civilized manner.

2.3 Rights to be Reconciled

As laid out in the White Paper, the broad formulations providing for confessionality appear realistic and acceptable. However, it is necessary that the rights to be guaranteed be truly protected and that the law provide them with a legal basis totally beyond dispute.

For, as one can well imagine, the difficulties encountered at present are not going to disappear as if by magic. Many groups will try to have schools which correspond to their aspirations in all respects. It will not be possible, practically speaking, to totally satisfy everyone. Moreover, in each school it is necessary to continue to treat with great care those who do not share the convictions of the majority: this means the school will have to willingly exercise restraint. Besides, this has already been experienced. One need only consider here, for example, all the modifications that primary teachers must make to their catechetical teaching when one of their students enrolls in a moral instruction course: instead of distribution lessons in a flexible manner over the whole week, they have to plan an exact timetable from which it is practically impossible to deviate. Such a situation will very likely persist in most schools.

This will require on the part of everyone a deep sensitivity toward others. They will also need to have a clear and definite perception of the rights they can count on.

Several times, the Comité catholique has reiterated the need to make the Catholic school an open school receptive to all, respectful of the rights of everyone and refraining from all intolerant attitudes. It remains just as convinced that, in our historical and cultural context, the Catholic school corresponds not only to the wishes of a great part of the population, but also to very real collective rights. One must forestall the setting in motion of a process whereby a one-sided and abstract appeal to individual rights would invalidate well established collective rights which the government itself intends to guarantee in its law.⁷ One particular interpretation — too abstract in our opinion — of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms leans towards this and asserts in the extreme that only one dissident voice in the religious area makes it impossible to establish a Catholic public school. In his speech to the congress of l'Association québécoise des conseillers au service de l'éducation chrétienne, the ministre de l'Éducation specifies that the «duty of reservation» which, under the Charter, every confessional school must heed «forbids all intolerant attitudes, and all moves toward marginalization or forced enrollment»⁸. The Comité cannot but agree with this view. But the problem arises when some, wanting to impose their own idea of religious education, assert that this «duty of reservation» must go as far as to render Catholics totally silent. This is why it appears important⁹ that the formulation of the law guarantee beyond any doubt the right to a Catholic school. This makes it imperative that its scope with reference to the formulation of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms be well clarified.

7. See the speech previously cited, p. 7

8. Ibid. p. 9

9. The Comité approached this question from another angle in its document of last July: *The Catholic Public School in an Evolving School System*, pp. 3-6.

The Comité therefore recommends:

1. *That the law include guarantees whose aim is to ensure in all public schools the respect of the rights and freedoms of conscience and of religion, notably by offering Catholic religious instruction and pastoral animation to Catholic students.*
2. *That laws establish beyond all doubt the right of communities to a public school of Catholic confessional status.*

3. Provisions Envisaged for the School

Beyond the issue of the main dimensions of confessionality, there remains the question of the kinds of concrete arrangements that will enable confessionality to be carried out. What are the means to be used, the services to be provided? Obviously, it is only once the projected law itself is known that we will get a clear idea of what is guaranteed. However, it is not useless even now to make some comments and to draw up some recommendations.

Starting first of all with the school itself, the Comité wishes to take up four points which more particularly affect confessionality, these being: Catholic religious instruction, pastoral care, pedagogical support and the confessional status of the school.

3.1 Catholic Religious Instruction (White Paper, 4.2.4, b, c, d, e, f, p. 76)

The Comité is in agreement with setting up an option system between Catholic religious instruction and moral instruction

for each of the primary and secondary years. Its own analysis of the situation had already led it to decide to change its own regulation and to establish this option system for Catholic schools within the framework of the present law.¹⁰ The new law would make it the object of an explicit stipulation and would extend it to all the public schools of Quebec.

On this question of Catholic religious instruction, it seems necessary to repeat a conviction that the Comité already had occasion to express: it is unrealistic to guarantee the quality of this instruction without the support of dedicated and competent teachers who freely accept to give it.

To this end, the governmental project wants to entrust the Comité catholique with the task of defining the criteria of professional competence of these teachers. This implies that the assignment could be made with reference to competence and not exclusively with to seniority. This, then, introduces the domain of collective agreement stipulations.

The Comité will firmly support every initiative toward a flexibility which allows the qualifications of teachers to be really taken into account. Without such flexibility, it would become totally useless to draw up criteria of professional competence. This is why the Comité recommends:

3. *That the ministre de l'Éducation see to it that the assigning of teachers entrusted with Catholic religious instruction be related to competence and not exclusively to seniority.*

10. Cf. Comité catholique, *Catholic Religious Instruction and Moral Instruction in Catholic Schools*, May 1982.

But beyond collective agreements and professional competence, it is the concrete organization of the school itself which will allow the teachers to give quality religious instruction. This goes from the adequate planning of teaching workload to the pedagogical support which backs it up. But this also affects the formulas foreseen for replacing a teacher who wishes to be exempted from giving Catholic religious instruction: subtle pressures can be brought to bear so that one or the other is urged, in spite of everything, to give a religious instruction that does not reflect his deep religious beliefs. But, in an area such as this, the personal involvement of the teacher and his interest in the subject have a direct and basic effect on the quality of his teaching. The Comité therefore recommends:

4. *That in the management of human resources, account be really taken of the religious beliefs and freedom of conscience of those called upon to give Catholic religious instruction.*

In conclusion, the Comité would like to express its interest in the possibility of a special agreement whereby other religious communities could offer their own religious instruction. This could sometimes be difficult to organize; it would allow, however, an interesting evolution.

3.2 Pastoral Animation (White Paper, 4.2.4, g, p. 77)

Pastoral animation makes an essential contribution to religious education. In referring to it as «learning the practice of the Gospel», the Comité catholique indicated in Vol. 5 of *Voies et impasses* how this was a very special contribution and that it

had every right to exist in the school.¹¹ It is interesting, therefore, to gather from reading the White Paper that «... the public school will... provide religious or pastoral care» (p. 77). Three remarks can be made in this regard.

The first deals with the range of services to be offered in each school. From the very fruitful experience of the last years and the reflections of *Voies et impasses*, it should be relatively simple to draw basic criteria for Catholic pastoral animation and to specify the range of services that could be offered. It is obvious, however, that among these services, some seem absolutely essential, so much so, that in their absence one could hardly speak of true pastoral animation. The Comité should be permitted to identify them clearly. Here again, it is all a question of honesty towards those who use the school. We will probably have to come back to this point in the next months. For now, the Comité recommends:

5. *That the law give the Comité catholique the power to define the services or areas of activity that each school must guarantee in pastoral animation.*

A second remark deals with the clientele of pastoral animation. The White Paper states here that «religious or pastoral care (will be provided) for Catholic and Protestant students ... where requested by the parents» (p. 77). It would be much simpler — and at the same time respectful of the beliefs of everyone — that the law provide that Catholic pastoral services be offered to students registered as Catholic — who, moreover, remain free to choose them.

11. Comité catholique, *Pastoral Animation*, A synopsis of *Voies et impasses* 5, *L'animation pastorale*, 1981.

It will be sufficient for the school to make known these services. The Comité therefore recommends:

6. *That the law show that services of pastoral animation must be offered to students registered as Catholic.*

A third remark concerns the pastoral animator. On account of the nature of his work, it seems to us that he should, as provided for in the current agreements, secure a mandate from the bishop of the diocese where the school is located. The Comité should be able to make this one of its regulations.

3.3 Pedagogical Support (White Paper 4.2.4 h, p. 77)

Always with a view toward ensuring quality education, it is necessary to provide the teachers as well as the pastoral animators with good pedagogical support. Theirs is, in fact, a particularly demanding work, professionally as well as personally. It requires solid religious convictions. It implies constant adjustment to the expectations of the young, continuing improvement and renewal. It also demands that coordination be set up between teaching and pastoral animation as well as links established with Christian communities.¹² Without adequate support, it will rapidly become difficult to respond to the legitimate expectations held by the population regarding the quality of religious education in the school, its authenticity and coherence.

The governmental project foresees that within each school board there will be «one person who will be responsible for pedagogical support for the religious instruction and pastoral activities» (p. 77).

12. See the remarks of the Comité in: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Annual Report 1979-1980*, pp. 98-99.

The Comité cannot but welcome keeping a mechanism which it considers necessary to achieving the goal of quality which the present reform wishes to pursue: this mechanism takes on so much more importance now that school boards will be non-confessional.

In this new context, it will be essential that the person responsible for the pedagogical support to religious instruction and to pastoral animation also be in charge of supplying special help to a school which wishes to draw up an educational project of Christian dimension. Further, he should be entrusted with aiding recognized Catholic schools in the application of the regulations of the Comité catholique.¹³

Given the importance of the task described here, it is essential to make sure that it can be carried out in a truly efficient manner. To this end, a certain number of conditions must be fulfilled.

The first condition is obvious. The person in charge, discussed here must give exclusive attention to the dossier on Catholic Christian education. Considering that he must probably see to the needs of about thirty schools covering from primary to secondary levels, eventually francophone and anglophone, one can appreciate that his workload will be very heavy and that it will require all of his time and energy. It is necessary also that he be able to count on adequate human, material and financial resources.

13. These remarks, it seems, are in agreement with the government's intentions. In fact, in the speech previously quoted from, the ministre de l'Éducation describes the role of «catalyst» that the counselor in Christian education should play from now on with regard to the religion teacher and the pastoral animator, with regard to those in charge of the school and of its educational project, in conjunction with the Christian community. See pp. 11-16. This description clarifies our remarks and emphasizes their importance.

Furthermore, it is necessary for him to be free to work closely with those who are involved in this dossier at school level: teachers, pastoral animators, those in charge of pedagogical support, administration personnel. In accordance with the mandate which he will receive from the bishop, he will also have to provide a link between the Christian communities of the area and those in charge of the Church.

The extent of the task leads us to believe that this person should have a full-time post at the level of the general directorate of the school board. We are well aware that the request is important, but it is in accordance with what is usually done in many school boards; moreover we must not forget the totally new context in which he would have to work: that of a non-confessional school board.

Lastly, it is desirable that the Comité catholique have the power to determine the criteria of competence of the person in charge of pedagogical support to religious instruction and to pastoral animation as well as those of the pedagogical support personnel which the various schools will have been able to provide for themselves. Besides, the White Paper provides for the granting of this same power to the Comité with regard to teaching personnel (Catholic religious instruction) and pastoral animators (p. 76, par. f; p. 77, par. g). The Comité therefore recommends:

7. *That the person in charge of pedagogical support to religious instruction and to pastoral animation be also entrusted with helping the school in drawing up an educational project of Christian dimension as well as with supporting schools recognized as Catholic in administering the regulations of the Comité catholique.*

8. *That the person in charge of pedagogical support to religious instruction and to pastoral animation hold a full-time post at the level of the general directorate of the school board and that he give exclusive attention to the dossier on Christian Education.*
9. *That the person in charge of pedagogical support to religious instruction and to pastoral animation be able to count on sufficient human, material and financial resources.*
10. *That the Comité catholique have the power to determine the criteria of competence of the person in charge of pedagogical support to Catholic religious instruction and to pastoral animation.*

3.4 Confessional Status (White Paper, 4.2.4, i, j, k, pp. 77-78)

Further to the list of provisions which it proposes for confessionality, the governmental project recognizes the right of Catholic schools to exist. «After democratic consultations, any school that decides to have the Catholic or Protestant nature of its educational project officially recognized could submit its request to the Catholic or Protestant Committee, respectively.» (White Paper, p. 78)

This statement of the White Paper is fundamental because it recognises the existence of Catholic schools. It corresponds to the aspirations of large strata of the population. It reflects the very dynamics of the whole process of school reorganization which wants to «put them (the schools) back into the hands of those who use and run them» (p. 37). It is closely linked with everything that has gone into the making of the country in which we live. In our own context, the

result of a history that cannot be denied without destroying it, it seems altogether essential that «communities who opt democratically for an educational project that is explicitly inspired by specific religious belief and values will have the right to do so» (p. 77).

An ambiguity remains, however, when talking of recognition of the Catholic character of the educational project «democratically adopted by the school». This must be clarified at the outset.

This ambiguity derives from the fact that the expression «educational project» has taken on in our communities a narrowly technical meaning referring to a highly complex reality: it conjures up stacks of forms to be filled, steps to be taken, work sessions to be convened, clarifications to be made, punctual decisions to be made treating in detail all the activities of the school. The Education Act supports this view of things when it defines the educational project as follows: «an undertaking by which the school specifies its own objectives, sets itself a plan of action, carries it out and periodically revises it with the participation of all agents involved» (R.S.Q., chapter I-14, section 1). Taken up again in the White Paper (p. 39), this definition places before us an undertaking which starts with explicitly drawing up both general and particular goals, moves on to setting up a concrete plan of action and ends with a mechanism whereby retroaction and evaluation allow for constant adjustment to an evolving situation. It happens that voluminous documents have to be compiled for the description of such «educational projects».

Our intent here is not to challenge the validity and the interest of such an undertaking: it enables the pooling of energies. But, it seems important to emphasize that before becoming involved in

this complex process, some clarifications should be democratically made: «What kind of education should be provided in the school? Which basic values should be given priority? Which integrating principle does one want to retain? Which philosophical or religious tradition will be the inspiration and the norm of all educational activity?» In short, before setting particular goals and embarking on the formulation of a plan of action, it is necessary to define the overall goal pursued, the type of school desired, the overall project one intends to launch. «Educational project» could be discussed here, but in the usual, ordinary sense of the expression, not in the precise and technical meaning given it in the education milieu: this is bound to evolve along with educational laws and theories. What must be ascertained at the outset, what should be the object of broad consultation, is the will of the community, especially that of the parents. Eventually, this common will, will have to be recognized by a confessional committee, since it will be accompanied by commitments that will enable its authenticity to be verified. Starting from this democratically expressed and accepted will, it will be possible to specify more specific goals and to draw up an appropriate plan of action, in short «educational project» such as is defined by the law. The Comité therefore recommends:

11. *That the Comité catholique have power to recognize as Catholic, through granting the status of Catholic school, the school*
 - *which requests it following upon the expression of a will democratically arrived at in conformity with the demands of the law and its regulations;*
 - *and which meets the other criteria for recognition set by the Comité catholique.*

Two other briefer remarks concern the official recognition of the school and the methods of consultation.

It seems important to the Comité that this recognition be granted by a body officially mandated for this. Otherwise we relapse into total confusion and run the risk of false representation. It is inconceivable that a public school could officially call itself Catholic if its project or orientation had not been recognized and confirmed by an official body whose authority is recognized by the law.

It is also important to reflect on the respective role of all those involved in setting up the methods of consultation. As a matter of fact, the White Paper asks that it be the confessional committees who define the content and the conditions for granting official recognition, as well as «the forms to be given to the consultation preceding the request» (p. 78). The Comité catholique certainly feels responsible for the methods of consultation. In fact, obviously, in the first stage, these methods will apply mainly to schools already recognized as Catholic which will have to decide whether or not to request that their confessional status be maintained. Moreover, the methods of consultation are closely linked with the criteria for recognition, since the first and foremost criterion is the explicit will of a community to have a Catholic school.

But, on the other hand, the consultation is an essential element of the process by which a given community indicates the kind of school it would like to have; furthermore, such a consultation will have to take place in new schools which have never had a confessional status. It is important to ensure that this consultation be democratic and meaningful, respecting the established powers and the various population groups. And this is an area of activity in which the government cannot be disinterested.

For these reasons, the Comité feels that setting up procedures of consultation should be the joint responsibility of the government and the confessional committees. Establishing regulations defining

the general procedures of consultation should, therefore, be the object of a concerted effort of the government and of the confessional committees. This is why the Comité catholique recommends:

12. *That the drawing up of regulations defining the general procedures of consultation concerning the confessional status be the object of a concerted effort between the government, the Comité protestant, and the Comité catholique.*

4. Provisions Envisaged for Other Structures

There will be a number of structures that will gravitate around the school, the hub of the whole system. In limiting itself for the time being to the area of confessionality, the Comité will review three of these: the school board, the ministère de l'Éducation, the Comité catholique.

4.1 The School Board (White Paper, 4.1.2, p. 60; 4.2.4 h, p. 77)

The governmental project provides that from now on, school boards will no longer be confessional.¹⁴ This represents a major change and it is difficult to foresee all of its consequences. This change is situated within a set of concrete provisions which must be kept well in mind: a) all Quebec public schools would be public and community schools; b) legal guarantees would be given so that quality religious instruction and pastoral animation would be available to Catholics in these schools; c) some schools would

14. With the exception of those whose existence is bound to rights guaranteed by the Canadian constitution. See the White Paper p. 65. The Comité will not address the question of these school boards here.

be entrusted with powers and responsibilities previously given to other bodies, more specifically that of defining the general orientation and the educational project of the school in its charge.

The Comité will later have the opportunity of raising a few questions on the whole project of school reorganization. The observations that it wants to make at this time are situated in the very precise context described in the preceding paragraph and are valid only within that context. What it finds, therefore, of primary importance is that, whatever the status of the school boards, guarantees be given and mechanisms set up so that the Catholic school be able to reach its goals and that religious rights recognized by the law be respected in all schools.

This will require that those in charge of the school board demonstrate a real sense of democracy and fulfil in all fairness their responsibility towards those Catholic schools under its jurisdiction. From the start, this responsibility should go beyond sheer tolerance and the application of minimal legal requirements. This will be a responsibility to be fulfilled and discovered in relation to the expectations of the communities. It will suppose real determination to guarantee and to take the responsibility for the development and the support of local projects and of the particular needs of the Catholic school.

The importance of the role to be played in this context by the person in charge of pedagogical support for religious instruction and pastoral animation has already been noted above. The Comité thinks that within a non-confessional school board there should be further provision for a special committee particularly concerned with the religious guarantees provided by the law in each school and which would at the same time support Catholic schools in carrying out their educational projects. Such a committee was mentioned in

the recommendation made by the Comité to the ministre de l'Éducation with regard to school reorganization on the Island of Montreal.¹⁵ It is therefore recommended:

13. *That within every school board be established a committee to see to the application of the guarantees concerning Catholic religious instruction, pastoral animation, and the Catholic school.*

4.2 The ministère de l'Éducation (White Paper, 4.2.4 1, p. 78)

The Comité notes, with great satisfaction, that the White Paper maintains the post of Associate Deputy Minister for the Catholic faith. It seems to the Comité that this Deputy Minister should be in charge of the provisions of the new law relating to Catholic religious instruction and pastoral animation, under the authority, of course, of the minister and the deputy minister and taking account of the requirements of coordination established in the ministry. He should see to the state and needs of Catholic religious instruction and pastoral animation, to the integration of the needs of Catholic religious instruction and pastoral animation with government policy concerning the educational system, and be responsible for the orientation and general direction of schools recognized as Catholic. To support his activity, the Comité believes it essential that the Associate Deputy Minister continue to be assisted by a Direction de l'enseignement catholique and, in each regional office of the ministry, by a respondent for the dossier on Christian education. This is why it recommends:

14. *That the Associate Deputy Minister for the Catholic faith continue to be assisted by a Direction de l'en-*

15. See Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *State and Needs of Education*, Report 1976-1977, p. 240.

seignement catholique and, in every regional office of the ministry, by a respondent for the dossier on Christian Education.

4.3 The Comité catholique (White Paper, 4.2.4 e, f, g, i, k, pp. 76-78)

With regard to the Comité catholique, the White Paper indicates the government's intention to review the legislative provisions relative to its powers and responsibilities «to make sure they conform to the new regulation of school confessionality» (p. 78). There are still many unknown factors concerning very important questions such as the number and the manner of nominating the members of the Comité, the status of its president, etc. It will be necessary to bring this up again. But, as the White Paper mentions a number of elements related to the mandate to be entrusted to the Comité, right now the Comité would like to broach three questions, keeping in mind that it has already discussed above: setting the criteria of competence for the person in charge of pedagogical support (pages 14 to 17), for the recognition of Catholic schools, as well as the setting up of methods of consultation (pages 17 to 21).

A first question has to do with the area of competence of the Comité catholique. At present it extends to all schools recognized as Catholic, whether private or public, from primary through secondary or collegial levels. It also extends to Catholic religious instruction in schools and institutions not recognized as Catholic. But, the proposed law only concerns primary and secondary public schools. Will the future law render former laws null and void? If so, what will become of the role of the Comité catholique with regard to private schools and colleges? Will these institutions be in a legal vacuum? It seems important that such a legal vacuum be

avoided and that the area of competence of the Comité continue to extend to all of these institutions. The Comité therefore recommends:

15. *That the Comité catholique retain its jurisdiction as recognized by the present law (R.S.Q., chapter C-60) over colleges as well as primary and secondary private schools.*

A second question has to do with the position of the Comité within the overall context of all the organizations involved with education.

Since its establishment, the Comité catholique has been connected to the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation of which its president is an ex-officio member. While maintaining the autonomy necessary to its power of recommendation and regulation, the Comité has, over the years, been able to count on the resources at the disposal of the Conseil, its committees and commissions. For their part, the members of the Comité have been able to enjoy very enriching relations with the members of the Conseil (and its commissions): it is not possible, in fact, to separate the Comité's concern for confessionality from the whole of the concerns related to the field of education.

The White Paper gives no indication about the role and the powers that will fall to the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation. It is difficult, therefore, for the Comité to make a precise recommendation. It seems obvious to it, however, that the Comité catholique should continue to benefit from sufficient autonomy, that it should be able to count on adequate resources and have active links with the main consultative bodies established by the law in the area of education. In this regard, it is difficult to understand the White Paper's altogether incidental comment to the effect that the presidents of the Catholic and Protestant Comités will sit on the Conseil supé-

rieur «as associate members with no voting privileges» (p. 77). Unless there is a special reason not stated, the present situation on this point seems to be preferable by far. This is why the Comité recommends:

16. *That the Comité catholique retain real autonomy, that it be able to count on adequate resources and have links with the consultative bodies established by the law in the area of education.*
17. *That the president of the Comité catholique continue to sit with full rights on the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation.*

A third question has to do with the power, mentioned in the governmental project, to recommend the recall of curricula (cf. 4.2.4 i, p. 77).

Its aim seems praiseworthy: it is expected, in fact, «that the teaching practices of a school will be completely compatible with the values and attitudes fostered by religious instruction or pastoral activities» (p. 77).

To this end, the Comité catholique was entrusted with the power to approve, from a religious and moral point of view, curricula and teaching material used in schools recognized as Catholic. In the hypothesis where schools are primarily community schools and where a certain number of them subscribe neither to Catholic nor to Protestant confessionality, the Comité's power of approval can be maintained with difficulty as it now is.

This is why the White Paper, in its French version, plans to replace it with the power to recommend a «recall». This mechanism seems, however, hardly acceptable. It could even become odious. The recall would come too late — when curricula would have already been introduced and teaching material already in use. It would further run the risk of discrediting the authors of the curricula or of the recalled material and of entailing considerable expenditures. It is undoubtedly with this in mind that the White Paper adds: «It is likely that the confessional committees will rarely have to resort to this special measure» (p. 77).

For its part, the Comité suggests a more flexible mechanism which would acknowledge its right to be informed and its power to advise. The law should provide that confessional committees must be informed of new curricula and teaching material before these receive final approval; also that these committees have the power to advise the minister regarding their religious and moral dimension. If there are, in fact, competent bodies to evaluate this dimension, they are indeed committees established to represent those who share the same religious and moral convictions... And this would eventually prevent many conflicts, opinion campaigns, much loss of time and money. The Comité therefore recommends:

18. *That the Comité catholique have the power to approve Catholic religious instruction curricula and the outline of the objectives of pastoral animation as well as related guides, text books and teaching material; that the law recognize, moreover, the Comité's right to be informed of other study programmes as well as related pedagogical guides, text books and teaching material awaiting approval and that the law give the Comité power to advise the minister in good time on their religious and moral aspect.*

II- Questions on Other Aspects of School Reorganization

To conclude its reflections, the Comité would like to broaden its angle of approach and briefly raise some other aspects of the school reorganization project. It wishes to echo here questions which the exercise of its mandate allowed it to pick up from a large number of those active in education.

The Comité cannot but agree with the ultimate goal of the reform: to re-emphasize the value of the school and to make it more responsible; it is generally satisfied with the provisions for school confessionality. On the other hand, the broad scope of the reorganization causes anxiety and provokes questions.

While trying to remain separate from any ideology, the question must be carefully put as to whether participation and democratization will be better ensured in the new system than in the present one. If so, could such participation be accommodated without the upsets which until now seem quite considerable. The Comité is afraid to see an entire system built up almost exclusively dependent on volunteers. It wonders if the experience of the administrative boards of the cegeps, of the hospitals and of the C.L.S.C. has been sufficiently taken into account. As Quebec has barely finished absorbing the reform of the 60's, as it has just started the pedagogical reform of *L'École québécoise*, must it become involved in yet another structural reform of such broad scope?

Moreover, the Comité is worried about the eventual absence of the teachers in the proposed structures. How will they be integrated into the school team? How will a school be able to carry out the educational project that it wishes to pursue if the teachers are not active participants from the very start?

When reviewing one by one the problems identified in the second part of the White Paper, it becomes clear that many of them could be solved by timely intervention: integration of school boards, making government budgetary norms more flexible, modification of administrative methods, modification of collective agreements, increasing budgets awarded to schools, adjusting the school map, etc. Almost all the usual constraints identified risk remaining unchanged in the new school organization. It is not radically transforming the structure, by taking «a great leap forward» that participation will become something easy, that collective agreements will become more flexible, that coordination will be easy, that the sharing of a budget by various schools will be carried out harmoniously, that budgets will increase, etc. The responsible school must be attained by sheer hard work on all of these levels. Would it not be preferable that it gradually take shape while moving forward?

The Comité only wants to ask these questions. It will fall to other bodies to ascertain their relevance. Still, the Comité would have felt it was shirking its duty not to have raised them.

MEMBERS OF THE COMITÉ CATHOLIQUE

Lucien BEAUCHAMP
Président du Comité
Salaberry-de-Valleyfield

Denise BÉLANGER
Parent
Cap-de-la-Madeleine

Jean-Guy BISSONNETTE
Vicaire général du Diocèse
de Saint-Jean — Longueuil
Longueuil

Yvon CHERRIER
Chef de l'approvisionnement
des films
Radio-Canada
Île Bizard

Noëlla CRÉPEAU-CLERMONT
Professeur à l'école
Joseph-François-Perreault
Rosemont

Rita DUBÉ
Conseillère pédagogique en
enseignement moral et religieux
à la C.S.R. de l'Estrie
Saint-Denis-de-Brompton

Bernard FORTIN
Directeur
Office de la famille de Montréal
Rosemont

Pierre GAUDETTE
Professeur à la Faculté de
Théologie
Université Laval
Sillery

André GAUMOND
Curé de la paroisse Saint-Pamphile
Saint-Pamphile

Denise HÉBERT
Conseillère en animation
au Petit Séminaire de Québec
Sainte-Foy

Joseph HOFBECK
Professeur de théologie à
l'Université Concordia
Pierrefonds

Marie-Alice LUPIEN
Infirmière à l'hôpital
Le Gardeur
Saint-Sulpice

Fernand PARADIS
Directeur général
Commission des écoles catholiques
du Québec
Québec

Pascal PARENT
Curé de la paroisse Sainte-Blandine
Sainte-Blandine

Charles VALOIS (Mgr)
Évêque de Saint-Jérôme
Saint-Jérôme

Richard BROUSSEAU
Sous-ministre associé
Ministère de l'Éducation
Québec

Guy MALLETT
Secrétaire

Édité par la Direction des communications
du Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

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